

Message Text

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USICA WASHDC
SECSTATE WASHDC 6732
USNMR SHAPE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

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USINFO FOR PGM/RC; PGM/PP; EU; STATE FOR EUR/NE, ROOM
5141 AND EUR/RPM

E.O. 11652: N/A
SUBJECT: BELGIAN MEDIA REACTION

1. BELGIAN MEDIA WAS DOMINATED MAY 23 BY THE AFTERMATH OF THE FRENCH BELGIAN RESCUE OPERATION IN SHABA. IN ADDITION TO CONTINUING EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF ATROCITIES IN KOLWEZI GARNERED FROM RETURNING REFUGEES, REPORTING CONCENTRATED ON BELGIAN-ZAIRE RELATIONS AND PRESIDENT MOBUTU'S CRITICISM OF FOREIGN MINISTER SIMONET'S ALLEGED DELAY TACTICS REGARDING THE BELGIAN RESCUE OPERATION, PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS' JUSTIFICATION OF GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO PARLIAMENT AND WALLONIA LIBERAL PARTY PRESIDENT ANDRE DAMSEAUX'S VIRULENT ATTACKS FROM THE OPPOSITION BENCHES ON THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PREMIER'S ALLEGED SLOWNESS IN UNCLASSIFIED

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GETTING PARATROOPERS ON THE GROUND IN THE BATTLE AREA.

2. COMMENTING ON TINDEMANS' EXPLANATION MAY 22 TO PARLIAMENT, OUTLINING THE DEVELOPMENT AND RATIONALE FOR BELGIUM'S SHABA OPERATION, MANU RUYS IN DE STANDAARD OBSERVES: "...THE QUESTION TODAY IS NOT SO MUCH WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE ACTED DIFFERENTLY. WE BELIEVE

THAT IT ACTED PROPERLY AND THAT THE CRITICISM OF THE OP-
POSITION IS WEAK. THE QUESTION -- AND IT WAS NOT POSED
BY THE PREMIER -- IS WHAT IS TO BECOME OF OUR ZAIRE
POLICY. CAN COOPERATION BE CONTINUED? IF SO, HOW?
THE QUESTION DOES NOT ONLY CONCERN SHABA. ALL OF ZAIRE IS
A PROBLEM AREA ... THIS IS THE SITUATION. CAN PARLIAMENT
IGNORE IT? PRESIDENT MOBUTU HAS NOW ANGRY WORDS FOR THE
BELGIAN AND EXPECTS SALVATION TO COME ENTIRELY FROM THE
FRENCH. BUT WHAT IS BEING DONE IN ZAIRE TO MAKE POSSIBLE
A BEGINNING OF A RECOVERY? THE ONE-WAY REPROACHES OF THE
PRESIDENT ARE BECOMING SOMEWHAT MONOTONOUS...THE CHRISTIAN
DEMOCRAT PARTY AND THE VOLKSUNIE PARTY HAVE REQUESTED A
THOROUGH REVIEW OF OUR RELATIONS WITH ZAIRE. IT IS A DE-
MAND WHICH PARLIAMENT CAN READILY MAKE ALSO TO THE GOVERN-
MENT."

3. HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG WRITES: "WHAT IN OUR VIEW WAS
LACKING ABOVE ALL IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT IS AN
IMAGE OF FUTURE RELATIONS BETWEEN BELGIUM AND ZAIRE. THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE WILL HAVE TO FILL THIS VACUUM. FOR
IT WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE NOT TO CHANGE AT ALL OUR RELATI-
ONSHIP WITH KINSHASA AFTER THE SHABA TRAGEDY. BECAUSE OF
THE DEAD AND THE SURVIVORS OF KOLWEZI, BELGIUM CAN NO
LONGER ACT AS IF IT WERE A HUMBLE ZAIRE LOBBY, FORGETTING
AND FORGIVING EVERYTHING. BETWEEN BRUSSELS AND KINSHASA
THERE CANNOT BUT BE A HUMANITARIAN AND POLITICAL GAP --
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WHICH CANNOT BE CLOSED ANYMORE WITH FRIVOLOUS PROMISES ON
THE PART OF THE ZAIRE PRESIDENT..."

4. HET LAATSTE NIEUWS WRITES: "AS IF PUBLIC OPINION HAD
INSUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING FOR THE NEED OF THE BELGIAN
INTERVENTION IN SHABA THE GOVERNMENT KEEPS UNDERLINING
THAT IT HAD NOTHING BUT HUMANITARIAN INTENTIONS. THIS
EMPHASIS IS SUPERFLUOUS, AS IS HAUGHTINESS TOWARD FRENCH
INTENTIONS. THERE IS NO REASON TO BE SHY WITH WORDS. THE
RESCUE OF THE EUROPEANS REQUIRED THE ACTION OF ARMED
FORCES WHO HAD TO COMB OUT KOLWEZI IN SEARCH OF VICTIMS
AND IN SO DOING CHASED AWAY THE REBELS. BELGIAN AND FRENCH
DID WHAT MOBUTU'S SOLDIERS WERE AGAIN UNABLE TO DO. THE
FRENCH LEGION WAS THE FIRST TO ARRIVE ON THE SPOT. HAD THE
BELGIANS BEEN ABLE TO DO THIS THEY WOULD HAVE HAD TO OPEN
THE WAY TO GET TO THE HOSTAGES WITH THEIR WEAPONS. AN-
OTHER SOLUTION WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE. HENCE THE
USELESSNESS OF NAGGING AND FRICTIONS CAUSING RANCOR IN
THE WESTERN CAMP. THIS IS ESPECIALLY SO BECAUSE A MIL-
ITARY INTERVENTION AS A FINAL SOLUTION IS COMPLETELY IN
LINE WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW AS SOON AS IT IS NO LONGER
POSSIBLE TO MEDIATE WITH A VALID INTERLOCUTOR, AN APPEAL TO

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DOES NOT OFFER A SOLUTION, ALL DIPLOMATIC POSSIBILITIES ARE EXHAUSTED AND THE COUNTRY ON WHOSE TERRITORY THE INTERVENTION MUST TAKE PLACE AGREES TO IT..."

5. ALSO DISCUSSING THE FUTURE RELATIONS BETWEEN BELGIUM AND ZAIRE, LA CITE ASKS: "SHOULD WE TIE OURSELVES ONLY TO THE REGIME OF THE PRESENT PRESIDENT? IS THERE AN ACHIEVABLE ALTERNATIVE? MR. MOBUTU IS VERY ANGRY AT MR. SIMONET'S ESTRANGEMENT FROM HIM. IN FACT, WE SHOULD NEITHER 'DROP'

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THE COUNTRY NOR CHANGE THE MEANING OF OUR COOPERATION. WE ARE COOPERATING WITH THE COUNTRY AND NOT WITH THIS OR THAT REGIME. THE BELGIAN VICTIMS OF SHABA ARE THOSE OF A MIS-UNDERSTANDING."

6. LA LIBRE BELGIQUE, TURNING TO THE DIFFERENCES IN APPROACH BETWEEN FRANCE AND BELGIUM, WRITES: "BRUSSELS AND PARIS SHOULD PUT AN END TO THEIR JEALOUSY RESULTING FROM THE FACT THAT THE BELGIANS ARE SOMEWHAT THREATENING SOME FRENCH INTERESTS IN THE IVORY COAST AND BECAUSE THE FRENCH DO THE SAME TO BELGIAN INTERESTS IN KINSHASA. A MAJOR CONCERN SHOULD PREVAIL OVER ALL OTHERS: TO BUILD THE EURAFRICAN COMMUNITY, I.E. TO USE A COMMON LANGUAGE AND PUT AN END TO

PETTY COMPETITION WHICH MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR AFRICAN COUNTRIES TO ELUDE SOME OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES BY PLAYING PARIS AGAINST BRUSSELS AND VICE-VERSA. ONLY THEN WILL IT BE POSSIBLE TO ENVISAGE A SOMEWHAT COHERENT EURAFRICA."

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7. DAMSEAUX CAME UNDER SHARP ATTACK IN MANY NEWSPAPERS FOR ESSENTIALLY TAKING CHEAP POLITICAL SHOTS AT THE TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT. HET VOLK SAYS DAMSEAUX "WENT SO FAR AS TO INSULT THE BELGIAN PARATROOPERS BY YELLING THAT ONLY THE FRENCH PRESIDENT AND THE FRENCH TROOPS IN KOLIEZI HAVE BEEN CAPABLE OF RECTIFYING THE STUPIDITIES OF THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT. FURTHERMORE, HE CONSIDERED IT SUITABLE TO FLATTER MOBUTU AND HE INSULTED A FEW MILLION STARVING BLACKS BY STATING THAT LIFE WAS AT LEAST POSSIBLE UNDER THE MOBUTU REGIME...HIS WORDS WERE IN STRONG CONTRAST TO THE REFUGEEEST ACCOUNTS..."

8. OTHER COMMENTS" "A PAINFUL SURPRISE..SMELLING STRONGLY OF DEMAGOGY", WRITES GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN. HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG CALLS IT "PARTY POLITICAL GUERRILLA FIGHTING" AND DE STANDAARD SAYS THAT "THE BELGIAN LIBERALS' CRITICISM (INSPIRED) BY PRO-FRENCH FRENZY MAKES ONE UNEASY BY ITS BLIND GLORIFICATION OF PARIS. HOWEVER, ONE VIEWS IT AS THE UMPTEENTH EXPRESSION OF A GROUP WHICH IS ONLY CONCERNED ABOUT ECONOMIC INTERESTS."

9. LE PEUPLE COMMENTS THAT "MR. ANDRE DAMSEAUX, FOR ONE, DID NOT UNDERSTAND ANYTHING. EXCEPT ONE THING: THAT THE SHABA DRAMA OFFERED HIM PERHAPS THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTRACT A FEW POTENTIAL VOTERS..."

10. BUT FOR LA DERNIERE HEURE, MR. DAMSEAUX'S ADDRESS REPRESENTED "A MOMENT OF SIMPLE AND GENUINE ELOQUENCE. MR. DAMSEAUX REFLECTED THE FEELING OF A GREAT DEAL OF PUBLIC OPINION BY HAILING THE FRENCH PARATROOPERS, BY THANKING THEM, BY DENOUNCING THE HESITATIONS AND THE INTERNAL CRISIS OF THE 'CRISIS CABINET', BY DENOUNCING ALSO THE

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WEAKNESSES OF THE GOVERNMENT TOWARD ALL KINDS OF REVOLUTIONARIES WHO ARE BOSSING THE SHOW IN OUR COUNTRY."

KORENGOLD

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